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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of social support on parent-child interaction with a group pf 21 adolescent mothers. The subjects participated in a 20-week model demonstration program designed to offer social support through a variety of activities (work-study programs, life-skills classes, child care training, counseling, and referral assistance). A key aspect of the program was the opportunity for the subjects to work in a preschool classroom with skilled caregivers who were known to interact with children in a postive, facilitating manner. Each of the 21 subjects was videotaped interacting with a 1- to 2-year-old infant within a month of entering the program and again after completing the program. Caregivers' styles of interaction were coded from observations using the Caregiver Styles of Interaction Scales (Dunst, 1984). A 2 test occasion (Pretest vs. Posttest) X 5 caregiver styles (responsive, engaging, elaborative, imposing, coercive) repeated measures ANOVA was used to determine if there were changes in caregiver behavior during the course of involvement in the program. Findings indicated that the adolescents became significantly more competent in the use of facilitative styles of interaction (responsive, engaging, elaborative). (Author/PCB)

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The Effect of Social Support on Adolescent Mothers' Styles of Parent-Child Interaction

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of social support on parent-child interaction with a group of 21 adolescent mothers. The subjects participated in a 20 week model demonstration program designed to offer social support through a variety of activities (work-study program, life-skills classes, child care training, counseling, and referral assistance). A key aspect of the program was the opportunity for the subjects to work in a preschool classroom with skilled caregivers who were known to interact with children in a positive, facilitating manner. Each of the 21 subjects was videotaped interacting with a 1 to 2 year old infant within a month of entering the program and again after completing the program. Caregivers' styles of interaction were coded from observations using the Caregiver Styles of Interaction Scales (Dunst, 1984). A 2 test occasion (Pretest vs. Posttest) X 5 caregiver styles (responsive, engaging, elaborative, imposing, coercive) repeated measures ANOVA was used to determine if there were changes in caregiver behavior during the course of involvement in the program. Results produced significant main effects for test occasion, $F(1, 20) = 13.88$, $p. < .001$, and caregiver behavior, $F(1, 20) = 26.57$, $p. < .001$, both of which were qualified by a test occasion X caregiver behavior interaction, $F(4, 80) = 9.95$, $p. < .001$. Findings indicated that the adolescents became significantly more competent in the use of facilitative styles of interaction (responsive, engaging, elaborative).

INTRODUCTION

Pregnant teenagers and their offspring are at risk for a number of medical, psychological and social problems. However, converging evidence from a number of sources suggests that provision of support can have positive effects on parent and family well-being and prevent negative reactions to an adolescent pregnancy (Barrea, 1981; Figley & McCubbin, 1983; Held, 1981; McCubbin & Figley, 1983). The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of social support on parent-child interaction with a group of 21 adolescent mothers. The subjects participated in a 20 week model demonstration program designed to offer social support through a variety of activities.

Description of the Program

The 20 week model demonstration program in which the subjects participated included a number of activities. These were (a) on-the-job child care training, (b) life-skills classes, (c) individualized goal planning, (d) counseling, and (e) referral assistance. The activity designed to produce a change in caregiver interaction styles was the on-the-job child care training. This training was provided by the girls working as classroom aides in a preschool for handicapped and nonhandicapped children. Each teenager was paired with a skilled caregiver (paid staff and parent volunteers) who was known to interact with children in a positive, facilitating manner. The caregiver modeled styles of interaction with the children and gave the teenager guidance and feedback. Each teenager worked in the classroom four hours per week throughout her 20 weeks in the program.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 21 pregnant teenagers/teenage mothers who participated in the model demonstration program described above. Thirteen girls were Caucasian, eight were Black. Of the subjects, 19 were primipara pregnancies. Their mean age of entry into the program was 16.62 years. The average years of school completed by the group was 9.86. Twelve subjects were still enrolled in school at the time that data collection occurred (two subjects had graduated from high school). The majority of the subjects fell into the lowest two SES strata (Hollingshead, 1975). Five of the subjects were married and were living with their spouses, eleven were living with their own parents, and five lived with friends or relatives.

Procedure

Each of the 21 subjects was videotaped for a period of 20 minutes with a one-to-two year old infant. Seven of the subjects were videotaped with their own child. The subjects not having a child in this age range selected a child from the preschool classroom in which they were working. Videotaping was carried out within a month of the teenager's entering the program and again after she completed the program. A container of toys was placed within easy reach of the child. The container included an assortment of toys that would appeal to children of this age group (e.g., a music box, two telephones, wind up toys, a Jack-in-the-box, etc.). The subject was instructed to play with the child.

The frequency of the subjects' styles of interaction were coded from observations using the *Caregiver Styles of Interaction Scales* (Dunst, 1984). These scales are designed to code the types of interaction styles caregivers use with their children during caregiver-child play episodes. Included on

this scale are six mutually exclusive styles of interaction: (a) passive, (b) responsive, (c) engaging, (d) elaborative, (e) imposing, and (f) coercive. Definitions of each of the six styles of interaction can be found in Table 1. For the purposes of this study the passive style was not included since it better lends itself to a duration rather than frequency measure.

To record the data from the videotapes, each of the six styles was designated with a number from one through six. As a behavior occurred, the observer entered the number of the interaction style on a portable computer (Radio Shack, TRS-80, Model 100). Data was collected in this manner for a continuous 15 minute time period. In order to allow for a warm-up period for the teenager and child, data coding began after the first two minutes of the tape had been viewed. Interrater reliability was obtained by two observers independently rating the videotapes. Interrater reliablility ranged from .81 to .96 with the mean being .89.

RESULTS/CONCLUSIONS

A 2 test occasion (Pretest vs. Posttest) X 5 caregiver styles (responsive, engaging, elaborative, imposing, coercive) repeated measures ANOVA was used to determine if there were changes in caregiver behavior during the course of involvement in the program. Results produced significant main effects for test occasion, $F(1,20)=13.88, p.<.001$, and caregiver behavior, $F(1,20)=26.57$, $p.<.001$, both of which were qualified by a test occasion X caregiver behavior interaction, $F(4,80)=9.95$, $p.<.001$. Follow up t-tests were run on each of the five styles of interaction. Findings showed significant pretest-posttest increases in the frequency of responsive, engaging, and elaborative styles of interaction. These results are shown in Table 2.

In conclusion, girls who participated in a 20 week model demonstration program which offered social support through a variety of activities became significantly more competent in the use of facilitative styles of interaction

with young children. They showed significant increases in the frequency of contingent responding to the infant's behavior, attempts to maintain the infant's ongoing play with both the animate and inanimate environment, and attempts to get the infants to produce variation in their behavior repertoires.

Table 1

Continuum of Parental Styles of Interaction

PASSIVE	RESPONSIVE	ENGAGING	ELABORATIVE	IMPOSING	COERCIVE
Caregiver rarely responds to child's behavior.	Caregiver responds verbally and/or nonverbally to child's behavior.	Caregiver encourges child to interact with people/objects.	Caregiver provides opportunities for behavior differentiation.	Caregiver elicits attention/interrupts ongoing behavior of child.	Caregiver directs and control's child's behavior.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for the Frequency of the Five Caregiver Styles of Interaction

	Pretest		Posttest		
Styles	M	SD	M	SD	t
Responsive	11.00	8.61	17.52	15.42	2.82*
Engaging	17.57	8.96	35.29	25.15	3.52*
Elaborative	3.52	4.72	21.71	20.70	3.59*
Imposing	15.00	6.86	16.00	8.18	0.72
Coercive	0.81	1.44	0.86	2.19	1.16

* $p < .001$

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